

The Happy Balanced Writer
Workbook Two: Mental Health



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Chapter One: What Is the Happy Balanced Writer?

*"Never get so busy making a living
that you forget to make a life."
— Dolly Parton*

Who I Am

Hello and welcome to the Happy Balanced Writer! My name is Holly Davis, and I wear many hats. In real life, I work full-time as an outpatient physical therapist, drive forty minutes to and from work every day, take care of my fur babies, spend time with my fiancé, do household chores which include all things “adulting,” spend time with my mom and older sister for “fam night” once a week, try to see various friends once a month, annnnd that’s it. Phew. Pretty busy life, huh? It seems like I don’t have too much time for anything else.

But you see, I have a not-so-secret life as a middle grade/young adult fantasy writer aspiring to be a published author. This dream consumes most of my brain space as I try to squeeze my writer life into any spare moments I have.

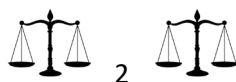
“But wait, Holly, you just said you don’t have much time for anything else.”

Not quite.

What does my writer life entail? I outline, draft, and edit a novel about once a year; stay engaged and current on my social media platforms, which include Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; post one or two videos a week on my YouTube channel (which includes scripting, setting up my recording space, filming, editing, making thumbnails, descriptions, etc); watch YouTube videos and read writing craft books to improve my craft and learn from fellow writers; read books both inside and outside of my genre; and work on side projects like this workbook! Okay, now what did I say about all that time I don’t have?

Forget about needing more time. What about energy? What about needing to sleep, eat, relax, and just chill, so that I can do ALL of the things? The thing is, we’re not meant to do all of the things. Trying to do all of the things will lead to you not wanting or being able to do very much at all.

Forget about everything else I’m doing on the writerly side of things. Let’s say all I do is work on my novel. Well, that’s still a struggle. It’s hard enough to balance just work and



writing, which is why I call writing my part-time job. Sure, it's fun, but it's also work! It takes time, energy, and talent. It also requires discipline, perseverance, and determination, all of which I've acquired (and tried to maintain) throughout the past four years.

Why I Created This Workbook

I'm eager to teach you the strategies I've learned from my experiences in life as well as from those around me to help you achieve work/life balance and become a HAPPY BALANCED WRITER. I want you to find the time to write without neglecting your daily tasks, to be happy, fulfilled, stress-free, and productive. We already endure enough stress without all the craziness of the writer life. Stress, self-doubt, laziness, and fear are what stop people from reaching their dreams. I don't want you to be one of those people. I want every single one of you to have your book on the shelves, and I want every single one of YOUR books on MY shelf. ☺

I, too, want to achieve Happy Balanced Writer status. I'm not always there. Sometimes I reach it, but I quickly fall back. I'm constantly faced with challenges which help me learn and grow. I'm not perfect, which is why I've created this workbook—not only to help you, but to help myself as well. Because I believe in these workbooks 100%. If you want to achieve Happy Balanced Writer status, keep reading. You'll be grateful you did.

Who This Workbook Is for

This workbook is for:

- Full-time and part-time workers who write on the side
- Full-time writers looking to organize their life and increase productivity
- Students who try to balance classes and writing
- Writers looking to self- or traditionally publish
- Writers at all points in their journey towards publication
- People whose productivity suffer due to poor mental and physical health

How to Use This Workbook

I recommend printing out this PDF so that you can handwrite your answers. If you'd rather not print the pages out, you can always write your answers in a journal. Lastly, DO THE EXERCISES. You can read all about my tips, but if you don't apply them to your life, you can't truly implement these strategies and exact lasting changes. So, grab a pen, have a seat, and let's dive in.

Chapter Two: Stopping Self-Sabotage

"Get out of your own way. Often, we're our own worst enemy when working towards our goals."

-Robert T. Kiyosaki

Common Lies You Tell Yourself as a Writer

I don't know why we writers are so mean to ourselves, but we are. We say horrible things that we'd never say to our writer friends. So, why do we do it? I think it's natural and normal for people, especially writers, to sabotage themselves with their own self-doubt. We know that this is a tough industry and that rejection is inevitable (even though we see success around us and know it can happen to us). But we get scared. We think it can't possibly happen for us. And so, the doubt remains.

It's crazy, how many dreams have been stifled because of a simple thought. That thought grows, that LIE festers, until we start to believe it as truth. Yes, you heard me. LIES. This isn't a list of things writers say to themselves that are sometimes true. They're never true. So read the list of lies below. Maybe you've said one or all of these to yourself at one point or another.

List of Lies:

- I'm not good enough
- I'm not doing enough
- No one cares
- I'll never publish anything
- I'm taking too long to finish
- I'll never reach my goals
- I'll always be a hobby writer
- No one will ever take me or my passions seriously
- Writing or editing for only ten or twenty minutes isn't worth it
- Nobody will like my writing
- My writing isn't interesting
- I'm not good, so why try?
- I'm not a real writer
- My story isn't as great as I think

How Self-Sabotage Affects Your Writing Goals

Wow. I don't know about you, but that list of lies is quite the Debby-downer. Imagine saying all those lies to yourself day after day. You're going to start to believe them, right? And if you're telling yourself you're not good enough and that no one will like your writing, do you think you're going to continue writing? Probably not. Or it'll take you longer to finish your manuscript because you'll hold yourself back.

Your inner critic holds you back because you think you need to skip to the end when you're at the beginning or the middle. But that's not how this journey works. Writing is hard. No one said it would be easy. But you don't want to miss out on creating greatness just because it's difficult to do.

How to Silence Your Inner Critic

Many times, self-sabotage comes from a place of jealousy and playing the comparison game. You see someone else succeeding and think that can't be you, too. But remember, you should not compete with other writers, only the writer you were at the beginning of your draft or your last manuscript. Reframe your envy in a positive way and use that as motivation and fuel to work on your novel. It's okay to be a beginner. It's okay to make mistakes and re-make the same mistakes. It's okay to go at your own pace. It's going to be hard, but hard is not impossible. If you stop, then you're getting in your own way. You are your only limit. Read that again.

You are your only limit.

Success takes hard work and sacrifice, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. It's okay to learn along the way and grow with your WIP. The universe has given you permission. It's okay if you're a Work-in-Progress, too.

That leads into the other part of where self-sabotage comes from—perfectionism. Perfectionism sucks the joy out of living and creating. You tell yourself you aren't good enough, but even if you achieve "good enough" status, it won't be enough, because you'll still feel like you aren't perfect. You might even feel imposter syndrome and think you're in over your head, or that you were just one of the lucky ones who slipped through the cracks and don't truly belong here.

What I've found really helps to silence my inner critic and combat self-sabotage is to refocus with positive thoughts. I firmly believe affirmations and inspirational quotes will help you realize your full potential. If you ever need a pick-me-up, try reading these quotes for inspiration and to reframe your mindset:

“There are people less qualified than you, doing the things you want to do, simply because they decide to believe in themselves. Period.” -Unknown

“You owe it to yourself to become everything you’ve ever dreamed of being.” -W.H Murray

“Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.” -Thomas A. Edison.

“Worry is a misuse of your imagination.” -Curiano

“Remember that guy that gave up? Neither does anyone else.” -Unknown

“Thinking ‘here goes nothing’ could be the start of everything.” -Drew Wagner

“The thing is—fear can’t hurt you any more than a dream.” -William Golding

“We all have our moments of doubt, but how we react and overcome is what defines us as writers and as human beings.” -Sara Francis

“Knowing is not enough. We must apply. Wishing isn’t enough. We must do.” -Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

If you believe it will work out, you’ll see opportunities. If you believe it won’t, you will see obstacles. -Wayne Dyer

“I do not regret the things I’ve done, but those I did not do.” -Rory Cochrane

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” -Winston Churchill

“Magic happens when you do not give up, even though you want to. The universe always falls in love with a stubborn heart.” -J.M. Storm

“Your faith can move mountains and your doubt can create them.” -Ryan Medina

“Please ask yourself: What would I do if I weren’t afraid? And then go do it.” -Sheryl Sandberg

“Life is short. If there was ever a moment to follow your passion and do something that matters to you, that moment is now.” -Unknown

“Never give up on a dream just because of the time it will take to accomplish it. The time will pass anyway.” -Earl Nightingale



“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.” –Arthur Ashe

“A professional writer is an amateur who didn’t quit.” –Richard Bach

“We tend to forget that baby steps still move you forward.” –Raison Dexist

Wow!! How do you feel after reading that? Inspired? Empowered? Write your feelings down now:

What about those lies you told yourself earlier? Do you believe them anymore?

No?

I thought so. You’ve begun to stop believing the lies. It won’t be easy and it will take time. You’ve been subscribing to them so long. But you can break past the negativity and false talk.

Remember, words have power. Give them the right power. You were born to be real, not perfect. You are not your negative thoughts. You are not your lies.

Choose 1-2 quotes each week that you’d like to focus on to internalize these truths and sustain lasting effects. Write them in your planner, on your calendar, or leave a post-it note on your desk. Or you can make the quote your computer or phone background! In fact, I’ve chosen my three favorite quotes to combat self-sabotage and made images for you to use if you’d like to make them your phone background. See the last page of this workbook for all the awesome graphics! Cause we all know how much we check our phones. Imagine seeing these inspirational quotes every time you do!

 *End of Chapter Exercises*

Which 1-2 quotes will you focus on this week?

What lies do you tell yourself?

Turn your Lies into Truths

Example: "I'm flawed" becomes "I'm growing"

"I'm not good enough" becomes "I'm evolving and improving"

Analyze where your inner critic comes from. Are you a perfectionist? Do you play the comparison game?

What will you do when you hear your inner critic tell you lies?

Implement the Power of Yet

Write down the most common lies you tell yourself. Take a deep breath. Then add a “yet” at the end of your sentence.

Example: “I can’t do this” becomes “I can’t do this yet”

“This doesn’t work” becomes “This doesn’t work yet”

Chapter Three: Mental Health Awareness

*"We are all broken...that's how the light gets in."
-Hemingway*

Common Mental Health Illnesses

We've heard people call all writers introverted hermits, depressed people, and starving artists. Stereotyping writers into these categories is a huge fallacy that needs to end. But, that doesn't mean that some writers aren't struggling with mental health issues—some severely life-altering, while others are mild, less frequent, and easier to combat. Here are a few common disorders:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Schizophrenia
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Bipolar Disorder

Psychologists and researchers have found a positive correlation between artists, writers, poets, and musicians and mental illness. And yet many successful creatives have no evidence of a disorder. Therefore, everyone must realize that their lives are different. Some writers struggle with mental disorders, while others do not. If you do, know that of course, you're not alone, and most importantly, that it does not define you.

My Mental Health Illnesses

This section is all about my mental health story. I want you to know where I'm coming from as I give you advice, though my experiences are only about anxiety and depression. I was diagnosed with mixed anxiety and depressive disorder a couple years ago. I believe I always had these underlying conditions, yet they revealed themselves more and more as my writing journey evolved.

When I realized I wanted to finish my first novel in fall 2015, I only suffered from crippling self-doubt. I'd say to myself, "What do you think you're getting yourself into?" and "You're

in over your head.” Pretty much I said all the self-sabotage talk we discussed in the previous chapter.

As I went through periods of rejection and success, this ebbed and flowed. The one thing that only got stronger was my passion for writing, and my dream of becoming a traditionally published author. Thus, my anxiety and depression reared its ugly head. If I didn’t write or edit one day, or one week, I’d beat myself up about it. I was a failure in my eyes. Getting upset at myself for not writing only made things worse, because then it felt like a mountain too high to climb and took even longer for me to get out of my slump and back into the groove.

I am now on medication for my mixed anxiety and depression. It’s helped a lot, and I’ve been able to cut down my medication to half a pill a day, but I still get mad at myself that I even need that medication to function. The days I have tried to wean myself off are the worst. I fall into a borderline panic attack and can’t stop crying. It’s prevented me from going to work a couple times because I become stuck in my own head, and then I get so upset that I can’t get out of it.

Something I haven’t done yet is speak with a psychologist or licensed clinical social worker. I have seen one in the past for other issues, but never for my anxiety and depression. I will look into this in the future, but for now, I am managing my illness with my medication and self-care strategies (see the next chapter!).

How Mental Health Affects Your Writing Goals

Okay, so now that you know what you’re struggling with, how do you know if it’s even affecting your writing? Is it truly putting a dent in your goals? For many people, it does. Mental health disorders put people into writing slumps and ruin your momentum of writing and reaching your goals. The times I have fallen into a depression and couldn’t write or edit or do anything productive, it’s taken me over a month to get over it and back into a routine. That messes up my flow and pushes my timeline for editing and publication even further away. Of course, some people’s depression lasts shorter, others longer. In any case, it can lead to those lies our inner critic tells ourselves.

With anxiety, you might think that everything you write is bad. With depression, you might become paralyzed and unable to write, or you might not even want to write. OCD, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder can also add to one’s self-doubt and cause people to panic when things don’t go as planned. Mental health illnesses stifle our dreams and suffocate our creativity. They can cause us to focus on the negative and not even see the beautiful things happening around us and all that we ARE accomplishing.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. And if you end up there, you don’t have to stay. Your mental illness is not your home.

Ways to Overcome Mental Health Issues

First things first, if you have not spoken to your doctor or been diagnosed for your mental health disorder, I would urge you to see your doctor. They can direct you to the best forms of treatment, whether that's medication, seeing a psychologist, etc.

No matter the severity of your illness, you'll want to combat it yourself as well. You don't want to solely rely on these other things. So before we begin, I want you to realize two things:

- You must be gentle with yourself
AND
- You're doing the best you can

It's only when you give yourself grace for your falls can you pick yourself back up and start again. There's beauty in the breakdown, because you learn from yourself each time and come out stronger than before. So whenever you feel caught inside yourself, read these reminders:

- You're more than what you make
- Your productivity does not determine your value
- It's okay to do nothing sometimes
- Not everything you do has to result in a product
- Not everything you make has to be important, significant, or even good
- You can make things just for yourself
- You can keep secrets for yourself
- You're allowed to say no
- You're allowed to rest

Which two reminders will you choose to focus on this week?

Another way to combat mental illness is to perform self-care. The next chapter will guide you through creating your ultimate self-care routine to take care of your body, mind, and spirit.

 *End of Chapter Exercises*

What mental health illnesses are you fighting to overcome?

How do they affect you and your writing specifically?

How can you spin these issues to help you with your writing?

Example: "I am too emotional" becomes "I can write real, emotional scenes that my readers will connect with"

"My illness gets in my way" Becomes "I am more empathetic with people going through what I am going through. I can support others in the writing community and in turn gain support myself"

How will you overcome your mental health illnesses?

Decide when and where you will seek this help. Be specific!

Chapter Four: Incorporating Self-Care

"Self-care isn't selfish"

-Ashley Judd

Self-Care

Self-care is a hot topic nowadays, but I think it's because it's bringing to light just how important it is for us, especially as writers, to slow down. We are ambitious people, motivated, determined, full of dreams and goals. We know that we will finish our book with hard work, and hopefully, become published. Or become a full-time author. Or whatever we hope for in life. But so many of us don't take enough time for ourselves each week to relax, to breathe.

We think, "I can't spend time for myself. That's selfish." But the above quote rings true.

Self-care isn't selfish. Self-care is a priority and a necessity, not a luxury, especially for the work that we do, and especially if we have others we are caring for in our lives, whether it's babies, fur babies, family, significant others, or friends. Yes, it's okay to care for others. But you must also take care of yourself. You come first in your life.

Remember, self-care means giving the world the best of you instead of what's left of you.

How Lack of Self-Care Affects Your Writing

What happens when we lack self-care? It means you're always in go-mode. You're always "on." This can lead to severe burnout. You try to do everything and end up leaving nothing for yourself, for your soul. That can lead to worsening mental, physical, and emotional health.

When you don't take the time away from your projects, you can't fill your creative well. Then when someone asks one more thing from you, it's like trying to pour from an empty cup. You have nothing left to give. You become spiteful towards anyone or anything that "wastes" your time and takes away from your goal.

But I believe that is an exhausting and sad place to be. I was in this place last year. I didn't take care of my body. I fell into two depressive writing slumps last year because I was too

ambitious with my goals and didn't give myself enough self-care time. I gave myself one day a week to relax and focus on myself, but I didn't realize that I needed a bit of time each day to do at least one thing for self-care. I needed to work out more. I needed to eat healthier. I needed to stretch in between writing sessions and walk. I needed to meditate and live in the moment instead of always reaching for the future.

For some people, when they finally take some time for themselves, however that may look, they might feel guilty because they're not used to it. They think about all the things they could have been doing instead to be productive and check another box off their to-do list. But that's just crazy. Don't feel guilty for taking the time to re-charge and make yourself a priority. You should be at the top of that list.

Ways to Incorporate Self-Care

"Health does not always come from medicine. Most of the time it comes from peace of mind, peace in the heart, peace of soul. It comes from laughter and love." -Unknown

Self-care looks different for each person. That's why I gathered a long list of ideas for you (that aren't writing)! Find what works for you and is your ideal "me" time. It might take some trial and error to find what you like best (and that's okay!):

- Go for a walk outside, near a park, trail, or body of water
- Draw
- Color in an adult coloring book
- Journal
- Play board games or video games
- Cook/bake tasty and healthy foods
- Work out (home or gym)
- Do crafts
- Read
- Have a date night
- Take a shower
- Take a bubble bath or Epsom salt bath
- Light a candle or fireplace
- Use a face mask
- Paint your nails

- Watch TV/movies
- People/nature watch out the window
- Take a short nap
- Get a good night's sleep
- Drink a cup of tea/coffee
- Drink enough water
- Take a day off work to relax and focus
- Take photos
- Call/talk with friends or family
- Play with your pets
- Take your dog to the dog park
- Meditate
- Do yoga
- Dance to your favorite music

Getting sleep is an important part of self-care. Writers tend to sacrifice sleep to be more productive, yet that leads to a foggy brain during the day, resentment at your job or tasks that don't involve writing, and physical fatigue. I recommend setting "get ready for bed" and "go to bed" alarms to remind yourself each night when to start winding down.

Research has shown that meditating or doing yoga before bed increases your ability to achieve a good night's sleep. It also shows that you sleep worse when you're on your phone. So place your phone in the next room and get an actual alarm clock so that you're not tempted to stay up late mindlessly browsing social media. Instead, here are a couple ideas of things you can do before bed that promote a good night's sleep:

- Headspace app
- Simple Habit app
- Audible (free meditation guides)
- YouTube videos (search meditation or guided sleep)
- Instrumental music
- Body scans
- Read (a physical book!)

If you're a fellow "self-spa day" lover, I wanted to let you know that I'm an affiliate with Story Salts, a company that makes bookish bath salts and facial scrubs for fellow writers and book lovers for their self-care routine! Check out the products at <https://storysalts.com/>. If you're interested in anything, use my code WRITEHOLLYDAVIS to get 10% off your order! 😊

Want to work out but don't know what to do? Although I love gym memberships, they can be pricey and it can be hard to motivate yourself to leave the warmth and security of home. That's why I love free, at-home workouts. Check out some of my favorite YouTube channels:

- The Fitness Marshall
- Yoga With Adriene
- POPSUGAR fitness
- Blogilates
- The Betty Rocker
- MadFit

If you DO like gym workouts, I can't sing the praises enough of any of the New Rules of Lifting books by Lou Schuler and Alwyn Cosgrove. Their routines are amazing!

And last but certainly not least, here are some of my favorite YouTube channels for healthy recipes:

- Tone it Up
- Liezl Jane Strydom
- Liv B
- HealthNut Nutrition

 *End of Chapter Exercises*

Your Self-Care Plan:

Who?

Is there anyone you'll include in your self-care? Who? Why do you want to include them?

What?

What will you do for self-care? Choose from the list above or come up with your own!

When?

When will you incorporate your self-care routine? Decide whether to do a little every day as a daily routine and/or set aside one day a week.

Where?

Where will you incorporate your self-care routine? Will you have to plan to drive somewhere? Plan your locations to set yourself up for success!

Why?

Why did you choose this self-care routine for yourself? What do you hope it will do for you? Look back on your “why?” when you find yourself straying from self-care.

Changing Habits

What healthy habits will you adopt to promote a healthy life and a good night’s sleep?

Chapter Five: Closing Thoughts

*"First, say to yourself what you would be;
And then do what you have to do."
— Epictetus*

You made it! You've completed this workbook, hopefully with more mental clarity and inner strength, and with a lighted fire that will burn forever and help you crush your writer goals. I want to remind you that this workbook is not for one-time use. It's a sustainable tool that you can use to continuously improve your life. The writer life is filled with ups and downs, and you might find yourself struggling with different things along the way. So, you can come back to a specific section and use it as a magnifying glass to inspect and change the certain aspect of your life you want to work on. Whether or not you notice any specific struggles, I recommend checking-in with yourself with this workbook every couple months to make sure you stay on track and remain what I hope you have become:

A Happy Balanced Writer



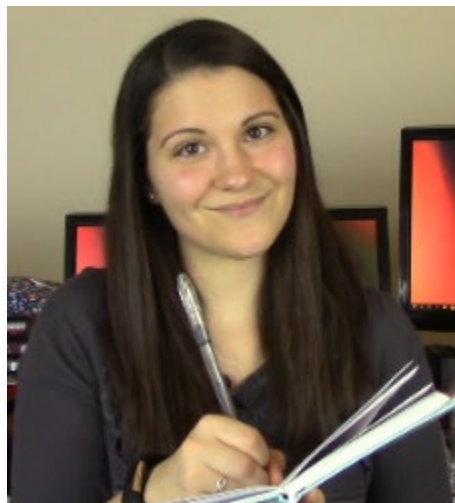
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Thank you to my twin sister, Heather, for motivating me via Skype to work on this workbook. I couldn't do any of this without you.

And thank *you* for purchasing this workbook and for believing in this tool to improve your work/life balance and help you reach your goals.

Bio



Holly Davis is currently working as an outpatient physical therapist in Chicago. She is engaged to a great guy (wedding date TBD) and is a fur mom to a pitty and two kitties. She began her writing adventures as a young child and has grown from writing Kingdom Hearts fanfiction to writing stories of her own. She is currently querying her third manuscript, a YA urban fantasy with light sci-fi elements called *The Celestial Code*, which she hopes to traditionally publish as her debut novel.

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